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Emotions, Judgments, and Life Quality

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In this paper I discuss how certain reductionist approaches to emotions and feelings leads away from a comprehensive understanding of what it is to be a whole and mature person. The specialized approaches are useful for limited purposes and help us to understand some of the complex details of our embodied existence. Attempting to reduce our cognitive and feeling states to chemicals or electric impulses using computer models makes no sense given the significance of our feelings within the larger context of our lives. It is true that our biology and brain chemistry can affect our perceptions and emotions. I assume for purposes of this paper that self-actualizing people are in good health and have reached a certain level of development. I do not spell out the details of a more comprehensive ecological and cultural account of feelings and reason since this is beyond the scope of this undertaking that focuses on our individual self.

Modern assumptions about the lack of awareness and feelings in animals have been completely undermined by recent work in field ecology, controlled animal studies, and ethology. These assumptions limit perception of our larger ecological and cultural context. It is related to Western ethnocentrism and Modern assumptions that only humans have self-awareness. This latter assumption comes from long-standing spiritual repression in the West, which began with the development of a “universal” dogma based on authoritarian religious institutions. This was what led Descartes, often called the father of Modern Western philosophy, to radically separate body from mind and claim that only humans have minds or souls.¹ There are older spiritual traditions in the West comparable to those in the East that do not suffer these assumptions. I describe these in broad terms as the *wisdom* and

mystic traditions. These include a wide variety of views and persons. These traditions are now re-emerging in our society. It needs to be stressed that I am aware of the vast diversity in Euro American cultures and that many people never bought in to the above theorists' assumptions about ourselves and animals. From an early age I was sensitive (as so many of us are) to the awareness of other beings and resisted the academic training to think otherwise.

My focus in this short paper is on how we can become more aware of our own inner processes and activities and how these relate to our actions and relationships. For this purpose I focus on the role that our beliefs and judgments play in creating our emotional responses to personal situations. Our lives are embedded in complex networks of relationships and there are many ways to describe these. When we look at our condition in a neutral way with mindfulness, we began to see how patterns of values and beliefs give us a meaningful life of actions within a personal and cultural context. We are also in the larger context of nature that I do not go into in this essay. I do attempt to relate what I am saying to the two traditions mentioned above. I will now describe those in more detail.

Two Traditions

Western narratives on self-realization tell of two old, overlapping traditions. They can be called the *wisdom tradition* (the way of reason) and the *mystic tradition* (the way of feelings). (In India these are Jnana and Rasa yoga.) Their stories tell us how to be self-realized persons in relation to nature and ultimate values. Socrates, Epicurus and Spinoza fit into the wisdom tradition, Plotinus, Meister Eckhardt, and Hildegard fit into the mystic ways.² Seekers in these traditions pursue self-knowledge, self-mastery, and integration of our diverse energies. Wisdom arises in active living, not idle speculation. A mature understanding of life comes from deep practical and spiritual experience. These traditions warn that doctrines and dogmas can interfere with self-realization, maturity and wise action. Texts can help, if we know how to interpret *and* apply them. They can lead us astray. Self-realization is not in conflict with passion and reason. Feelings and all of our powers are blended together in mystic unity. A fully integrated (whole) person has depths of understanding beyond trance-like conditioning, with its stories of confusion and self-deception.

The quality of a community depends on its individuals. We each participate in recreating and perpetuating the daily social reality that collectively constitutes our local cultural and personal worlds. Our experienced world changes as we change ourselves. The mystic tradition is at the heart of authentic religion, and the wisdom tradition is at the heart of the humanities. The human psyche or soul links these traditions. The mystics do soul work with our abundant affective emotional capacities. In the wisdom tradition the way to realization is through inquiring reason. Exploring either of these ways in depth leads us to the other.

The question, “what is the self?” leads to a deep *inner* concentration. Some mystic meditation practices focus attention inward to disengage from the objects of sense, so as to realize the nature of the inner self. During this process we *begin* to know an inner silence, and we realize that each of us is a self-reflexive, creative, and self-organizing agent. The source of meaning in our lives is found within us and in the quality of our relationships. Our whole self is a unity of sound and silence, light and dark. The mystic knows the ultimate as a radiant presence that is in all things. The self is an aware self-integrating energy. This reflexive awareness when unified gives us power to free ourselves from negative and divisive states; states that Spinoza called passive emotions.³

In the wisdom tradition, in coming to know the self, we let go of negative states to be aware of the range and depth of human feelings. We can passionately engage in positive actions and emotions that Spinoza calls self actualizing. Mystic and wisdom seekers use tested ways to become integrated so as to live with creative spontaneity and harmony. Unifying insight arises when awareness is free of attachments. This awakening cannot be communicated from one person to another through language alone, although certain words or gestures can trigger it. This aware aliveness must be *realized* by each person. There are guides and methods, but we must each do this real work for ourselves.

In both traditions, this deepening awareness experiences passions and emotions as *activities that we create*. They are part of a deep and rich life story. Our reaction to events and conditions is based on the way we judge them and how broad our perspectives. Knowing this, we can choose *how* we will be in the world. In judging others negatively, I also order my own experience in negative ways. I lower and diminish myself by negative judgments, especially when they are of me. Positive judgments and feelings have the opposite effect. We are limited by our

negative judgments and we limit our perceptions of others by judging and categorizing them.

In some monastic communities, members are held responsible for letting go of their negative emotions such as antipathy, hate, and anger. These adversely affect the group, and only the person can change them. This is their unique responsibility. Some versions of Christianity hold that we are responsible for our inner, emotional lives, which are reflected in our outer lives. Thus it is said, “As ye think, so shall ye be,” and “As ye judge, so shall ye be judged.”⁴ For both traditions, we are creative, sentient, moral, and spiritual beings able to realize ourselves by means of holy (i.e. whole making) practices. These uncloud our awareness, and by forgetting the ego self we realize our whole, unified self. This awakens our power to intentionally create and choose our life in the present as whole mature persons. In Hinduism this authentic, divine Self is called *Atman*; in other religions it is called our Buddha or Christ nature. In the wisdom tradition we realize our ultimate self values by caring attention from which wise actions flow. According to Naess, a mature person should be able to consciously choose their values and life philosophy with an emphasis on positive feelings.⁵ Writing from experiential knowledge of these traditions in the East and the West, Anthony De Mello observes:

Follow this procedure: No defect, no neurosis is judged or condemned. You have not judged others, you will be amazed now that you yourself are not being judged. Those defects are probed, studied, analyzed, for a better understanding that leads to love and forgiveness, and you will discover to your joy that you are being transformed by this strangely loving attitude that arises within you toward this thing you call yourself. An attitude that arises within you and moves out through you to every living creature.⁶

Some Modern Views of Emotions

Modern culture is ambivalent about the passions. Many Western thinkers from Descartes on describe them in wholly mechanistic, physiological terms, reducing all emotions to a few “basic” ones like fear, anger, love, and hate.⁷ Some theorists try to further reduce feelings to neurophysiological accounts of emotions and thoughts, which can be controlled via chemical manipulation, electric stimulation, or some other noncognitive means. These reductive accounts are challenged by many critics. They point out that emotions are neither mechanical nor blind, but involve perception, thoughts, and value judgments that are

self-involving and part of a larger relational context. To be understood they must be seen more holistically in larger patterns of meaning within personal and cultural settings. Actions cannot be reduced to bodily behaviour, physics, or chemistry.

Twentieth century psychology separated itself from philosophy, and the study of the self and emotions was already cut off from the older traditions discussed above. Instead of seeing these inner processes within a whole life context, vision was fragmented and specialized. As Carl Jung pointed out, this did not happen in many Eastern traditions in which these two approaches are continuous with those of ancient times. Religious monism in the West drove these spiritual paths underground, as recent research into religious history in the West has made abundantly clear.⁸ In the modern West, emphasis shifted to knowledge and power gained through technology and “hard” sciences. This led to a new mythology about the emotions that was cut off from older traditions and nature. This approach alienated us from our own intrinsic wild nature and whole self.

Psychology in North America emphasized developing theories and models for prediction and control of human and animal behaviour. Animals were considered incapable of thought and feelings, other than as survival mechanisms. The study subject became an object to be conditioned. To use Martin Buber’s language, the subject became an *it rather than a thou*. Self-knowledge was regarded as subjective, biased, and conducive to bad science. The methodology aimed for repeatable experiments yielding quantifiable results and using models free of value statements. This aim proved to be not achievable, since even basic logic assumes certain values, as Naess and others have shown.

The Emotion Myth

Robert Solomon observes in *The Passions* that there is a pervasive myth about the passions and human emotions in Modern society.⁹ The myth is that “the emotions are irrational forces beyond our control, disruptive and stupid, unthinking and counter-productive, against our ‘better interest,’ and often ridiculous.” He writes:

Since the earliest of Western thinking, the meaning of human existence has been sought first in the calm reflections of rationality . . . The passions, on the other hand, have always been treated as dangerous and disruptive forces, interrupting the clarity of reason and leading us astray.¹⁰

Solomon says that because of this myth, we believe that we cannot help what we feel. As a result, we do not teach our children how to work with their emotions; instead, we teach them to control their behaviour and expression of emotion. The emphasis tends to be on behaviour modification, conditioning and using drugs like Ritalin and Prozac. Some theorists, J. B. Watson for example, identify all psychic states with behaviour. Even William James characterized the emotions in his *Psychology* as “the bodily changes which follow directly the perception of the exciting fact . . . our feeling of the same changes as they occur *is* the emotion.”¹¹

Robert Plutchik's survey of various psychological theories of emotion illustrates the pervasiveness of the view (myth) that emotions happen to us and have no cognitive or judgmental elements.¹² They are blind forceful feelings. Accordingly, we are not responsible for our emotions. They are forces or feelings that rise up from below consciousness and often overwhelm us, making our lives miserable one moment and ecstatic the next. The myth has practical consequences, as it is used to excuse careless, thoughtless, and even irresponsible behaviour. Twentieth-century theorists attempted to reduce the seeming *diversity* of individual emotions to a basic repertoire of survival mechanisms: fear and anger, and flight or fight responses. In a positive sense, Darwin and others thought that emotions are successful evolutionary adaptations. This at least puts them in a larger context that includes our animal companions in this Earth journey. It gives us an alternative to reductionism. Today there is a growing literature not only on animal awareness but on their feelings and even on animal cultures.¹³

The great diversity of human emotions can be seen by considering our extensive language for them. This alone shows that they are not simple sensations or blind forces, but very sophisticated ways of engaging with our world in art and life. In considering emotions, Solomon gives a detailed analysis of forty-seven different ones: anger, anguish, anxiety, contempt, contentment, depression, despair, dread, duty, ecstasy, embarrassment, envy, euphoria, faith, fear, friendship, frustration, gratitude, grief, guilt, hate, indifference, indignation, innocence, jealousy, joy, love, penitence, pity, pride, rage, remorse, regret, resentment, respect, sadness, self-contempt, self-hatred, self-love, self-pity, self respect, shame, sorrow, spite, terror, timidity, and vanity. He notes that the total number of emotions is indefinitely large and capable of many different classifications.¹⁴ Moreover, no two people experience the same things, even though we say they are both angry. *Anger* is not one simple thing, but refers to a category of emotional responses and

actions that represent a wide range of different feelings and individual conditions.

Emotions can be compared in terms of degrees of intensity, depth, profundity, and subtlety. Feelings can be flat or soaring, weigh us down or lift us up. Unlike physical quantities, they cannot be measured by means of exact scales that apply numeric values that can be added or multiplied in precise ways. In terms of qualitative features they admit of a vast array of descriptive elements and modifiers almost without limit. They can be described as negative or positive, and as painful or pleasant. Poetry, art, music, dance, and speech all lend themselves to expressions of a vast array of feelings.

In giving more details about emotions, we realize that they are deeply involved with our conceptual abilities and values. Emotion statements have an object, propositional content, cognitive elements and evaluative judgments. For example: When we say that we hate something, we place a negative value on that thing, in contrast to something we love, which is a positive value. We make judgments about it, what it is, what value it has for us, and how we want to relate or not relate to it. Such remarks tell us about ourselves and the esteem we have, or do not have, for ourselves and others. Every emotion has such value judgments involved. Our emotions are deeply related to our evaluations and our relationships. We get angry because someone offends us; we take offence because we hold certain values; we accept and make certain judgments, which can be more or less intense, about the world, ourselves, and others. If I am angry with someone for damaging my car, I make positive judgments about *my* car. I make negative judgments about the other person's actions and the damage done to something I care about. If I did not value the car at all, I would probably not be angry. My evaluation of this accident might also change, if I learn that the other driver suffered from an uncontrollable fit causing his car to swerve. Our emotional responses, we find on analysis, embody intense, evaluative, self-involving judgments about others and the world. If we claim no ownership or engagement to anything and live as monks, our lives might be more tranquil, but also more limited in relationships and feelings.

Emotions as Constitutive

Solomon and other theorists rightly observe that negative and positive emotions have cognitive activities such as thoughts and evaluations at

their centres. We can actively change our emotions by exploring and changing these judgments. I will give my version of Solomon's account, that I call the *constitutive approach to emotion*. Solomon writes in his book *The Passions*:

It is the key to the philosophy defended in this book that there is no ultimate distinction between reason and passion, that reason and passion together are the means of "constituting," not merely understanding, the world. And this means that to understand a passion is to be in a position to change it. To "eliminate" the darker passages of the mind is to change the climate from fog to daybright, from seething resentment to noontime love. I have already indicated that I shall argue that all passions are not equally acceptable, and it is in the light of reflection that their differences become evident. My purpose here is a radical one: not only to understand but to change people, or rather, to let them "become who they would be." And with a change in people, no doubt, the world will change as well. Marcusse: "A radical change in consciousness is the necessary first step toward radical social change."¹⁵

I agree with Solomon that judgments and reason play a role in *constituting* or creating our emotions and actions. I too seek ways to help myself and others transform our lives to realize deeper experiences and higher quality of actions. I seek to open narrative space around our inner emotional life, so that it is easier to personally realize how our own participation generates positive and negative feelings. As mentioned earlier, Spinoza emphasized the importance of positive feelings to self-actualization. He summarized this by remarking that "we are as large as our love," and as small as our negative and petty feelings. Our feelings are central to everything we do. They can be the motive force to improve quality of life in the human world and our relations to nature. In the constitutive story we are not helpless victims of our negative feelings. We can become more *aware* of how our emotional life can deepen and mature through choice of positive values, aspirations and actions. This is not to deny, of course, that negative feelings can be a source of learning.

For the constitutive story then, we *are* the agents of our emotions. They are activities and processes that we engage in, rather than alien feelings that we must passively suffer. As Solomon puts it, we are able to "*do* our emotions." They are our own creations, constituted and shaped by intense, evaluative, self-involving judgments related to our engagements. Our emotions have logic and coherence as expressions of unique ways of relating to the world. They are a rich and essential part in a chosen, mature philosophy of life. They shape our character. Our

lived experiences result from our subjective interactions with the world. They create a sense of personal identity within our culture's stories and myths, which are connected meaningfully to our place. When we observe our own reactions, we find judgments involved in our responses to others and the world.

Our personal narratives weave together constitutive judgments and evaluations that give form to our pure spontaneous experience. Our shared values give meaning and significance to our lives and activities together. We live in layers of deep feelings and thoughts, in stories within stories. We characterize, identify or *define* ourselves by means of our larger passions such as a profession, performance singing, skilful mountain climbing, or beautiful skiing. The activities that we value for their own sake help make us who we are. Our passions help to create our systems of significant personal meaning that, at their best, weave our lives together in integrated, aesthetically balanced, and life-affirming ways, attuned to others, in harmony with Nature. To use literary language, we can "author" our own lives in these ways. We each create a unique ongoing story to which these feelings are essential. We can choose to live beautiful lives, committed to values that are both self-involving and self-transcending, as Gandhi did.¹⁶ We can choose a life philosophy guided by non-violence and kindness that realizes a unique ecosophy, as Naess has done. Our self-involving, evaluative judgments are at the centre of our choices. Using the constitutive approach we can gain insight into our emotional lives that reaches back to their origins in basic evaluative judgments and norms. Some of these judgments are taken nonreflectively from our society, parents, and peers, some we consciously choose. A mature person, Naess says, is fully aware of his or her values and priorities in the context of their whole life philosophy and relationships.

We can be trapped in negative emotional patterns until we *realize*, and not merely theorize, the extent to which we *do actively compose* our emotional lives. A feeling tone is created through constitutive judgments, for example "All Xs (bugs, atheists, etc.) are terrible!" These are often habitual and automatic, and yet they are open to change through self-aware scrutiny and correction.¹⁷ Usually we are not this aware of how our emotions arise. We were conditioned to respond in ways that are non-reflective. We unconsciously imitate the way others treat us, especially when children. For example, a child takes delight in playing with bugs, but then an adult comes along and recoils in horror, "Don't touch those dirty things." The child then might then start reacting in the same inappropriate way as the adult. Our responses may be appropriate at an early age, but can be inappropriate later in life.

Even reflective parents tend to treat their children as they were treated with the same feelings, especially in highly stressful situations. These patterns or gestalts can be changed. Self-deception and denial play a role in our customary lack of awareness, but so do other challenges that hide our true nature from us. That is, they hide from us our own powers of discrimination, self organization and self creation. This self-reflexive awareness is at the core of the spiritual dimensions of life. We learn to use these powers through practices such as meditation and yoga concentration. Through mindfulness we become witnesses who observe the patterns of judgment we automatically and habitually make.

We can work on our distressful feelings by getting at their core thoughts or judgments, through which the emotions are described and around which their energies form. A negative judgment might be that *we* are being treated *unfairly*, and that this is *outrageous*! Strong emotions are intertwined with intense evaluative judgments about one's situation, person, and relationships.

Self-Deception and Other Issues

The myth and habits have a hold on us partly because of self-deception. We are all more or less guilty of habits and deceptions involving our emotions and beliefs. The fundamental self-deception involves concealing from ourselves *the role we play in constituting and organizing our emotional and experiential lives*. We tend to blame others or Nature for our bad feelings and negative attitudes, but we usually don't thank anyone for the positive ones. Not exposing the myth that we lack control excuses us from examining and taking responsibility for the whole of our emotional lives. This can be painful and difficult work.

Our judgments are acts or activities that can hold us captive. We identify who we are with these judgments and so we (the ego) resist changing them, even when they make us miserable and are self-defeating. We just identify ourselves as a miserable person. Deep self-knowledge enables us to evaluate our own closely held judgments and evaluative assumptions. In the process we realize that we can change the way we are. Our evaluative judgments and beliefs can be open to ongoing revision. We can transform our experiential lives by changing our judgments and values to more appropriate ones, so we can live in positive ways. Socrates said, "The unexamined life is not worth living." Such a life lacks freedom to decide *how we will take things*. As Aldous

Huxley remarked, “Experience is not what happens to us, but what we do with what happens to us.” We have many choices in the judgments we make or cease to make, and the actions that follow. We can choose to be non-judgemental, and use choiceless awareness as one of many ways to experience ourselves and the world. An alert witness to this whole process can enter free narrative space to create new personal stories.

Since emotions *involve constitutive judgments*, we can see how the myth reinforces a misguided helpless passivity. According to the beliefs of the myth, all emotions are produced in us as passive, affective states; they are *not* the result of *participatory* activities. However, if this is true, it is difficult to see how, for instance, we can remain angry for years about a certain action, or about something that no longer exists. Why don’t such feelings die away as do other sensations and activities as time goes by? What do we ourselves do that brings them alive? If we accept the myth, there will always be irresolvable conflicts between our inner states and the state of the world, since there is nothing we can do about our emotions—we can only work on our overt behaviour. We cannot control the world or other people. It is senseless to try to help people change to more positive emotional responses to the world, if emotions are beyond our ability for self-creation. Human bondage, as Spinoza observed, is a result of our lack of awareness of our emotional options. According to the myth, we might escape tyrants, but we cannot escape or change our emotional temperament.

The wisdom and mystic traditions reject this myth. Their spiritual disciplines focus on our ability to reach ever-higher levels of integration and awareness, and to transform the negative energy of petty emotions into expansive positive feelings and actions. It is possible for each of us to actually *become* compassionate and transform our experience and relations with others and the world. Compassion can be practiced and become our way of being in the world. In this way we can realize our deep ecological Self that feels kindness for all beings. In the older literature, it is said that wise persons and realized mystics are not subject to manipulation through their emotions, not because they have no feelings, but because they are well integrated, balanced, and aware; thus they choose from rich possibilities. They are emotionally mature, which means that they choose how to respond to what happens in their world based on (ego) self-transcending values, as Gandhi showed by his example. A perceived loss or illness can be seen as an opportunity, a personal criticism as a compliment or a challenge for self reflection. An insect “pest” can be seen as a helpful symbiot. This capacity for self-

creation and organization is the philosopher's stone, that is, a transformative power that sets us free.

Self-Transformation and Choice of Quality

Something like the Modern myth clearly does have a hold on us, but not entirely. If we have been involved in a close, face-to-face spiritual community, we know that within such a community there is mutual support. People are expected to do something about their negative feelings, such as depression and anger, since these feelings adversely affect everyone in a close-knit community. They effect your close relations. Moreover, most of us have urged others and ourselves to change attitudes and alter moods, to forgive and forget. We psych ourselves up for a party, exam, or a speech; we work up enthusiasm for teaching Descartes' *Meditations* for the umpteenth time. We decide we are going to work at liking someone, even though we feel an immediate antipathy toward him. We are not helpless in the face of our prejudices. The key to such change is by becoming more aware of our judgments and options.

We might agree with Buddhist and Christian teachings that we should love and help one another. We should act with kindness of spirit. In both there are ways to cultivate this spiritual maturity through certain practices. They teach that we can each transform our inner lives through active care, by giving everything and everyone we are related to our full caring attention. We should be kind to ourselves, other humans and animals, in judgment, language, and action, as Naess shows in his life and work. If we fail on occasion, we should not be critical, but just try to do better from then on. Non-violent communication starts by not judging others or ourselves.

In the mystic and wisdom traditions there are stories about the *transmutation* of the emotions to free us from negative, self-destructive patterns. The language of *Alchemy* too, if interpreted metaphorically, is related to this process of inner transformation of the negative feelings, symbolized by changing base metals such as "lead and iron," into the noble "silver and gold" ones, representing purity in the soul. These narratives provide a whole system for self transformation that is conveyed symbolically. Their inner truth is the story of our own freedom for self-creation and unique personal lifestyle. Techniques and disciplines for such change are found throughout Eastern and Western traditions and in many contemporary therapies. They all emphasize the

role and efficacy of full, self-aware, moment to moment, mindfulness, for directing focused attention into the details of our inner lives and outer relationships to see how they arise and are interconnected. This mindfulness is not the same as formal meditation, nor is it contemplation in Aristotle's sense, although they are closely related.

Enlightened living can be described, in part, as being fully aware of our inner, ongoing, ever-changing nature as we live in the present. We lose control of our inner lives as we become less aware of their present nature, and when we are fixed, rigid, and mechanical in our habits. When we fixate on the past or the future, we lose present awareness. (Neither the past nor the future exist, except in our memories and imagination.) We close down our awareness and become dull and are *more* subject to control by others. Creative freedom grows out of being aware of how sensations, thoughts, judgments, feelings, and action arise, *as they unfold*. We can know them by way of *Spinoza's fourth way of unified knowing*.¹⁸ This is open, non-judgmental awareness that has kindness in it. This caring attentive mindfulness is the way Naess lives Ecosophy T. In Zen monastic practices it is mindfulness in daily life, as we sweep the floor, do dishes, or sit in formal meditation.¹⁹

Our participation in strong-feeling, constitutive judgments is the psychological key that unlocks the inner passage to wisdom and mystic *gnosis*. Our intense, evaluative, self-involving judgments can become more relaxed and open. When we are less judgmental, we are more compassionate. If I judge a chronic illness as *horrible*, then I do myself, and other people who suffer the disease, another harm. If I accept the condition and make the most of life, the illness can even be a source of deeper understanding, greater compassion and wisdom. This practical *self-knowledge* and personal involvement is an intense aliveness in the present. It is not just theory. We *can* be the *masters* of our lives at a very deep level. The practice of spiritual disciplines helps us to be aware of the role of constituting judgments and their embodiment in our life narratives and relationships. With greater awareness the constitutive approach shows clearly how this is possible with respect to our emotions; it also helps us to understand why our emotions are sometimes out of control.

Evaluative judgments, as already noted, are often habitual and uncritically acquired from culture, parents, and peers. These karmic attachments can lead us astray. In our normal lives we are both free and not free. We can be enslaved by our emotions, leaving our inner and outer lives prey to manipulation, conditioning, and habituation. And yet we can realize a greater freedom when self-awareness is focused *in the*

present on our emotional, passionate lives, giving us perspective for more expansive forms of evaluation. The less judgmental and the more positive I am about the world, the better and higher my quality of experience, and the more effective I will be in unifying myself for actions and relationships in harmony with the world. We do not need to be disciplined by some outside authority. We need to develop the self-discipline for non-judgmental awareness to realize how to participate in creating a rich inner life, expressed in beautiful actions. An emotionally rich life lies open to us through choices of possibilities found in open narrative ground. Such a mindful life will have ecological symbiotic benefits, and add complexity, richness, and diversity to the world.

Throughout this discussion I have used a typology of human nature consisting of spirit, intellect, emotion and physical sense. This is just one way to characterize our powers or forms of human awareness, as parts of the self or soul that we experience in our lives. It has been used in many traditions. In vernacular language, we call the mind or intellect the *head*, the emotional or affective centre the *heart*, the sensual-physical the *body or belly*. Their unifying energy is called the *spirit*. There are skills and disciplines for working with these energies, so that we can integrate them to create a meaningful life that benefits others.

In our society we focus on cognitive knowing, but downplay emotional intelligence and the affective dimensions of belief and feeling.²⁰ There are spiritual disciplines and *systems of practice* that integrate and unify our fourfold nature to be in harmony with our community and home place. This is one aim of deep spiritual work. Even at high levels of integration we must continue awareness practices, since our lives and the world are always changing.

Enriching Emotional Life

In traditions that emphasize self-knowledge as necessary for wise action, ecophilosophy is an activity that reflects on whole contexts to expand our understanding. It is comprehensive but grounded in reality through practices in a community and place. It aims to actively engage intelligence with feelings in actions in our home place in nature. It is a concrete individual engagement, not placeless abstraction. We find through increasing awareness that our positive passions can be grand conscious engagements that enrich and deepen our life experiences. The constitutive approach to emotions shows how reason and feeling can be integrated and wild and tame in harmony. Emotions form through

constitutive value judgments, and they are *in principle* open to examination, self-reflection and change. It is not strong emotions that cause us to be at odds with the world and others; it is specific intense judgments that set the stage for negative feelings and conflicts.

Without passion our lives lack energy and drive. The key to a high quality of life is found in the depth and richness of our passionate engagements. Reading good novels and listening to good music and poetry, with their wonderful nuances and great variety of feelings and emotions, deeply enriches our enjoyment of life. In responding to others we can find many ways to act that are either conflicting or expansive in understanding. We can judge a remark an insult and get angry, or we can take a more expansive approach and see that it was made by someone who does not understand our situation, or perhaps it is made by someone who is afraid. We need not take offence; we can always shift our perspectives to take in larger and different narrative contexts, ones that are more positive and allow more centres. We can reframe the situation.

The causes of our problems are not emotions in general, but rather as Spinoza said, self-defeating, negative, and life-denying emotions such as depression, anger, self-hate, greed, fear, and doubt. These narrow our possibilities and lead us to feel like smaller selves. The cure for such maladies is not the absence of emotion, for that is living death. It leads to isolation and alienation from others and the world. (It is the way some people feel on drugs like Valium and Prozac.) The cure is to expand our perspectives to engage in positive emotional judgments. We can create our own “mythology of the emotions” (as Naess does with his personal mountain myths) that gives our life self-transcending direction and significance. If we change our value judgments from egocentric to community focused, we realize a more expansive sense of Self attuned to our ecological place in communion with others. Living with simple means in beautiful relationships gives us a very high quality life, even with modest material conditions. The creation of beautiful relationships with the world begins with our own self.

The world offers a wealth of diverse materials from which to compose rich inner and outer lives. There are many opportunities for joy and friendship with so many fantastic beings and people all around us. To compose our experience in these positive ways is to approach life as a whole art and spiritual way. Let us appreciate how caring and impeccable such a life could be. Consider, for example, what Don Juan tells Carlos Castaneda about the meticulous conduct of the warrior's life in *A Journey to Ixtlan*.

For me the world is weird because it is stupendous, mysterious, unfathomable; my interest has been to convince you that you must assume responsibility for being here, in this marvellous world, in this marvellous desert, in this marvellous time. I wanted to convince you that you must learn to make every act count, since you are going to be here for only a short while, in fact, too short for witnessing all the marvels of it.²¹

Our cross-cultural world is rich in diverse mythologies about archetypal journeys that reveal to us an expansive and deep world of meaning and value found through inclusive awareness, compassionate action, and reconnection with wild Nature. We each have the power to consciously choose rich inner and outer personal lives. As we mature, we should be able to choose the quality of our inner lives by understanding the values and judgments we make. To be non-reflective and simply to control behaviour leads to self-negation and conflict. That we *can* be the creative sources of our own lives through conscious intent is an exciting and exhilarating prospect: Each of us can choose anything it is humanly possible to be, once we are free from the myth that holds us captive, in fear and denial, vulnerable to advertising, propaganda, and other forms of manipulation.

Once we evaluate our almost automatic judgments hidden therein, we are free to act in more original and considered ways. Judge not and become the witness, and then you enter *open narrative space*, free to create your own life story. As Jesus, Osho and other spiritual teachers have said, the secret of spiritual practice is found in “choiceless awareness.” In other words, “Judge not, lest ye be judged.” If you judge your life is terrible, it will be terrible. If you are nonjudgmental and aware, you can choose from unlimited value possibilities. When we are nonjudgmental, we see things as they are. We are able to blend and unify with what is. We can accept others by not judging or categorizing them. This is at the heart of non-violent communication. Again consider the words of De Mello: “It is nonjudgmental awareness alone that heals and changes and makes one grow. But in its own way and at its own time.”²²

What specifically are you aware of? Your reactions and relationships. Each time you are in the presence of a person, any person, or with Nature or with any particular situation, you have all sorts of reactions, positive and negative. Study those reactions; observe what exactly they are and where they come from, without any sermonizing or guilt or even any desire, much less effort to change them. That is all that one needs for holiness to arise.

But isn't awareness itself an effort? Not if you have tasted it even once. For then you will understand that awareness is a delight, the delight of a little child moving out in wonder to discover the world. For even when awareness uncovers unpleasant things in you, it always brings liberation and joy. Then you will know that the unaware life is not worth living, it is too full of darkness and pain.²³

In the wisdom and mystic traditions theories should be used heuristically, as if sound, but always open to change and modification. Religious doctrines should be seen in the same open way, as having complex depths leading to greater insight. Insight is spontaneous realization through direct unified awareness. In this respect P. W. Bridgeman's observation about science as open inquiry is relevant here. He said, "[T]here is no scientific method as such, but rather only the free and utmost use of intelligence." This describes life lived as fully conscious, joyful, and creative. (As Naess shows, it is the unattached inquiring awareness of the Pyrrhonic skeptic or wandering seeker, *zetetic*.)²⁴

The spiritual core of the mystic and wisdom traditions gives us clues for realizing the truth in our lives, the means of self-actualization through deeper awareness. Through this, wisdom and compassion are actualized. The mythical philosopher's stone is our transformative power to change our inner ways of acting. The stone is the jewel of inner transformation found through nonjudgmental awareness. In the Socratic tradition, inquiry and questioning lead to insight. The mystic tradition focuses on the cultivation of the affection to care for others. On some interpretations, this is the way taught by Jesus and Buddha that is realized by transcending the ego self through loving acts. When I am nonjudgmental and try to understand others, I relate to them as they are, not as I think they are as a result of using labels. The same is true for all my relations, not just to humans, but to all beings and nature as a whole.

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Notes

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